

“War Election
or
National Government”

Copies of Editorials which appeared in the
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by certain Gentlemen of Hamilton

A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Up to the present the Herald has not given support to the demand that has come from various quarters for the reorganization of the government at Ottawa on non-partizan, national lines. Not that we did not think such a reorganization desirable, but that, in view of the utterances of party leaders and the party press on the subject, we deemed it, though a highly desirable ideal, impracticable and hopeless of attainment.

Now, however, the political situation has so changed as to make the reorganization of the government on a national basis not merely an ideal but a necessity in the public interest and in the interest of the one great cause which should obscure all others—the carrying-on of the war. It is necessary to save the country from a period of party strife which would be disastrous, which would dampen patriotic spirit throughout the country and paralyze the national energies which ought to be concentrated upon war work.

If things are allowed to drift, a general election early in the present year seems inevitable. The opposition at Ottawa is evidently determined to oppose the proposed application for another extension of the parliamentary term. This would mean the enforced dissolution of parliament and an appeal to the country. Then would follow several weeks, perhaps months, of party strife. In every constituency the political battle would take precedence of the great war as the subject of prime importance. Time, energy, money which ought to go to the support of the national cause would be eaten up in partizan conflict. Then, whatever the result, would follow the aftermath of bitterness, of disappointment, of accusation and recrimination. Not for months would Grits and Tories be in a mood to co-operate again in the common cause.

A general election within the next few months would be calamitous. It should be averted. It can be averted—but only in one way, so far as we can see, and that way is through the organization of a “national” government.

Is this too much to ask of our political leaders? Is it too much to ask of them that for a little while they put aside party claims, the sweets of patronage, the hopes of party triumph, personal ambitions and sectional rivalries, and agree to combine all forces for the purposes of the war? This the mass of the people desire. Demands for it are being made from organizations in every party of the country. The need of it is felt and seen. Is the vision of the leaders dimmer than that of their followers?

Not only to avert what might be little short of a national disaster, but also in order that the national energies may be the more efficiently concentrated upon the task which steadily grows greater, is the organization of a “national” government desirable. How can Canada do her best when the men at the head of affairs are hampered in their movements by the need to calculate the political effect of every move?

That the Borden government has not, in performance, measured up to the standard of its opportunities during the war is only too true. But this is not so much the fault of the premier and his colleagues as it is the fault of the party system. If the Borden government were to be succeeded to-morrow by a Liberal government headed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the new government would do no better than the Borden government has done; we greatly doubt if it would do so well. One of the best and strongest party governments that ever existed was the Asquith government, and the Asquith government fell down when it came to tackling the tasks developed by a great war.

Few will deny that Canada has so far failed to put forth her full energies in this war. It is patent to all that much has been left undone that might have been and ought to have been done, and that much has been done amiss—that there has been much waste of energy and money, much misdirected effort. But it is idle to blame the government: no party government would have done much better. Let it be considered

that the government's every move has been made with the consciousness that, if it were to prove unpopular in certain sections or among certain classes, vigilant and active opponents, avid for office, would be likely to make use of it to stir up resentment against the administration.

The man-power of the country, after nearly thirty months of war, has not yet been sifted and organized either for military or industrial purposes. This great and necessary work could not be done by a Borden government; it could not be done by a Laurier government: it could be done by a composite national government.

Sir Robert Borden has said there will be no conscription in Canada; Sir Wilfrid Laurier has declared the same thing. Sir Robert Borden alone could not easily introduce conscription even if it were necessary. Neither could Sir Wilfrid Laurier. But both of them together, as colleagues in a national government, could.

The heavy taxation of war-profits, even to the appropriation of the whole of them in excess of a fair return on capital, is a drastic measure which a purely party government, looking to the future, could hardly be expected to introduce. Sir Robert Borden alone would not take that responsibility. Neither would Sir Wilfrid Laurier. But both of them together might.

Restriction of luxuries, even to the prohibition of their importation and manufacture during the war—this is a measure which may soon become necessary. Sir Robert Borden alone would hardly dare to sanction such a measure. Neither would Sir Wilfrid Laurier. But both of them together might.

The waste and ineffectiveness of the present recruiting system—the scandal of having hundreds of highly paid senior officers idling away their time in England—the failure to reorganize industry for war-work—these things, so difficult for Borden or Laurier alone to deal with drastically, could be satisfactorily dealt with by Borden and Laurier together.

Parliament can, if it will, compel the leaders to reorganize the government on national, non-partisan lines. But let us hope that the leaders will not have to act under compulsion. Let the premier invite the opposition leader to co-operate with him in the work of cabinet reorganization. Let Sir Wilfrid accept the overture. Their parliamentary followers would not dare to thwart them in a plan so truly patriotic and so plainly popular. The resignation of all the ministers should take place, and a new cabinet organized in which, to the extent possible, there would be representatives of all important classes.

Is this too much to hope for?

January 22nd, 1917

WHY NOT CO-OPERATE?

Of course the declaration of Mr. Lemieux that the only way to get a truly national government in Canada is to put Sir Wilfrid Laurier back in power, is merely absurd. But Sir Wilfrid might strengthen himself in the confidence of the Canadian people by offering, publicly and unreservedly, to co-operate with the premier in the organization of a truly national government.

If such an offer were made, and if Sir Robert Borden rejected the overture, Sir Wilfrid would be justified in refusing his consent to the extension of the parliamentary term. Then, in the event of a general election being held this year, the prospect of success for the Liberal party would be bright, particularly if Sir Wilfrid were to promise that, if his party were successful at the polls, he would organize a government on national lines, ignoring considerations of party.

But the premier could secure the advantage by making the first advances to the Liberal leader.

January 30th, 1917

